



## GATHAS I

### GATHAS

#### i. TEXTS

Each single song covers one chapter (Av. *hāiti*-, Phl. *hā*) of the *Yasna*. The Gatha collection is introduced by two Old Avestan meditational formulas, the *Yaθā Ahū vairiio* (= *Ahuna vairiia*, Y. 27.13; see [AHUNWAR](#)) and the *Ašəm vohū* (q.v., Y. 27.14), and by the *Yeṛjhē hātqm* prayer (Y. 27.15), which has come down to us not in Old Avestan but in archaized (perhaps re-archaized) Young Avestan (YAv.) language. The collection is concluded by the OAv. *Ā.airiāmā.išiiō* prayer (= *Airiāman išiia*, Y. 54.1; see AIRIAMAN IŠIA). Between the first and the second Gatha the *Yasna haptanḥāiti* or *Yasna* of seven chapters is inserted, an Old Avestan prose text that originally covered *Yasnas* 35-41 and to which *Yasna* 42 in archaized Young Avestan language has been added by a later redaction.

According to *Šāyast-nē šāyast* (13.50-52), the Gathas, without the introductory and concluding formulas and prayers but including the *Yasnahaptanḥāiti*, consist of 278 stanzas (*wacast*), 1,016 lines (*gāh*), and 5567 words (*wāzag*), which is approximately correct. A similar computation is given in *Zādsparam* (28.4 ff.).

*The five Gathas.* (1) The *Ahunauuaitī Gāθā* (Y. 28-34), seven songs with 100 stanzas of three lines of regularly 7 + 8-9 syllables each. Whereas this first Gatha is named after the *Yaθā ahū vairiio*, which is composed in the same



meter, the names of the four other Gathas are derived from their respective opening words. In the same way the names of the single songs are coined. Thus *Yasna* 28 is called *Aiiāsā hāiti* after the opening words of the first line: *ahiiā yāsā namanhā*. (2) The *Uštatauaiti Gāθā* (Y. 43-46), after *uštā ahmāi yahmāi uštā kahmāicī* (Y. 43.1), four songs with sixty-six stanzas of regularly five (46.15 four) lines of eleven (4 + 7) syllables each. (3) The *Spəntāmañiiu Gāθā* (Y. 47-50), after *spəntā mañiiu vahištācā manahā* (47.1), four songs with forty-one stanzas of four lines of regularly eleven (4 + 7) syllables each. (4) The *Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā* (Y. 51) after *vohū xšaθrəm vairīm* (51.1), one song only with twenty-two stanzas of regularly three lines of fourteen (7 + 7) syllables each. (5) The *Vahištōišti Gāθā* (Y. 53), after 53.1 *vahištā ištiš srāuuī zaraθuštrahē*, one song only with nine stanzas of four (53. 6 five) lines of varying number of syllables.

A legendary history of the Avesta (particularly of the Gathas) is found in the Pahlavi literature. It begins with the king Wištāsp (see [GOŠTĀSP](#)) who, after his war with Arjāsp (q.v.), is said to have sent messengers and books to disseminate the Mazdayasnian religion. It culminates with the Sasanian redaction of the Avesta under Kōsrow I Anōšīravān (for sources see Humbach, 1991, I, pp. 49-55).

In the so-called Pahlavi *Yasna* manuscripts, the Gathas are accompanied by a word-for-word Middle Persian translation, which seems to originate from the late Sasanian period. Its author (or authors) had a very poor knowledge of the Avestan language, rendering, e.g., by *čāstan* (to teach) grammatical forms of such different origin as *cōišəm* (Y. 46.18), *cōiš* (Y. 31.3, 45.10, 47.5, 50.3), *cōiš* (Y. 51.5), *cəuuištā* (Y. 34.13), *cəuuiš* (Y. 51.15), *cinas* (Y. 44.6) *fracinas* (Y. 32.5), *cōiθa* (Y. 46.9), *cixšnušō* (Y. 32.8), *cixšnušā* (Y. 49.1), and *caiiascā* (Y. 45.5). This kind of heavy mistakes was not without negative influence on the scholarship of modern times. The imitation of the free word order of the Avestan original by the Middle Persian translation is a further obstacle to its use, but occasionally the information provided by the glosses that are added in order to extract some sense from the Middle Persian translation is somewhat more substantial, showing more or less faint traces of a reliable tradition.

On the whole, the Middle Persian translation seldom offers an appropriate point of departure for a detailed scholarly approach to the Gathas, but an intensive comparison of its single lines and their respective glosses with their Gathic originals usually reveals the train of thought of the translator. This obviously reflects the Gatha interpretation by the priests of the Sasanian



period, the general view of which is closer to the original than what is sometimes taught about the Gathas in our time. The Sanskrit version, produced by the medieval Parsi scholar Neriosangh and transmitted in part of the Pahlavi *Yasna* manuscripts, is not based on the original Avesta but on the Middle Persian translation. Several problems of the Middle Persian translation are elucidated by it. Notable examples are Neriosangh's Sanskrit rendering of Mid. Pers. *ahlāyīh* "truthfulness" (Av. *aša-* "truth") not only by *dharma-* but also by *puṇya-* "religious merit," that of Mid. Pers. *ahlaw* "truthful" (Av. *ašauuan-*) by Skt. *puṇyātman-* "of meritorious soul" or *muktātman-* "of emancipated soul," and that of Mid. Pers. *druwand* "deceitful" (Av. *drəguuant-*) by Skt. *durgatimant-* "unfortunate, distressful."

The text of the Gathas did not come down to us in a form as close to the original as the Indian Rig Veda did. The hypermetrical repetition before the verb of a number of verbal prefixes standing in tmesis (e.g., Y. 46.2 *ā īt [a]juuaēnā ahurā* = 7 syllables) unambiguously is a result of redactional work. Unconscious changes are involved by the practice of slow chanting such as the development of the internal vowel in OAv. *š'īiaoθāna-/š'īiaoθana-* "action," which, no less than YAv. *š'īiaoθna-*, counts two syllables, or by the intrusion of typically Young Avestan characteristics such as the internal vowel *i* of *yima-* (< Proto-Ir. *yama-*; Mid. Pers. *jam, jamšēd*), the name of the king of the Iranian paradise, as contrasted with the correct Old Avestan internal *ə*, which is preserved in the common noun *yəma-* "twin" (Y. 30.3). In the course of time, the Gatha transmission also incurred several corruptions in the stricter sense of the word. Among these is the loss of the line *Yasna* 46.15e. Some more is lost in *Yasna* 53.6 if the irregular number of its five lines resulted from a contraction of the remains of two regular stanzas.

A part of the well-devised phonetical differentiations made by the inventors of the Avestan script is blurred in our manuscripts. Thus, for instance, *mañiiəuš*, correctly written with the palatal nasal *ñ*, has in most instances been replaced by the "vulgata" readings *maniiəuš* or *mainiiəuš* with the indifferent nasal *n* (Hoffmann and Narten, p. 61). In many cases, the phonetically mixed outward appearance of the text could partly be due to a redactional attempt to balance the diverging pronunciations of different oral traditions by accepting them alternately in order to comply with the wishes of their respective upholders as far as possible. Leaving such secondary problems out of consideration, the Gatha text established by Friedrich Karl Geldner (q.v.) in his edition of the Avesta is materially reliable as a whole. Just a few substantial improvements



brought forward by Christian Bartholomae (q.v.) and others must be taken into account. Thus, Bartholomae was right when he corrected Geldner's reading *mūθrām ahiiā magahiiā* (Y. 48.10) into *mūθrām ahiiā madahiiā* "the urine of that (demon of) intoxication" (= that urine-like intoxicant). The wrong reading had crept into the text under the influence of the similarly sounding *mīždam ... ahiiā magahiiā* "a prize for this offering" (Y. 53.7).

The avalanche of emendations of the transmitted text, released by Fredrich Carl Andreas (q.v.) and which was absolutely unsuited to cope with the difficulties of the Gathas, dominated Gatha scholarship untill the middle of the 20th century. The first attempt to introduce philological methods in Gatha scholarship was undertaken by Helmut Humbach in 1959, who intensified the utilization of Rig Vedic data of grammatical and lexicographical nature; he also was the first to apply internal comparison systematically and to adduce Young Avestan parallels. Nevertheless, even works of scholars of our time show strong tendencies towards disregarding these principles and making arbitrary emendations of the text, be it to substantiate their own hypotheses by producing desired translations or to develop certain linguistic ideas, or be it to fill up hypometrical and to reduce hypermetrical lines of the transmitted text.

According to tradition, the five Gathas are composed by Zoroaster himself, thus being the only authentic religious heritage left by him to posterity. The prophet's authorship has recently been questioned by Jean Kellens and Éric Pirart, (I, p. 17 ff.), who emphasize that the name of the prophet is given in the third person in ten Gathic occurrences, for instance in *kā uruuaθō spitamāi zaraθuštrāi nā mazdā* "who is the man to be an ally of Spitama Zaraθuštra" (Y. 51.11), and that he is even addressed in the vocative as in its parallel *zaraθuštrā kastē ašauuā uruuaθō* "O Zoroaster, who is your truthful ally" (Y. 46.14). Yet these are rather figures of speech not unknown in oriental poetry, which are applied here by the prophet in order to imprint his name in the memory of Ahura Mazdā. The tradition is corroborated by *Yasna* 43.8, where Zoroaster, being asked for his name, introduces himself as *zaraθuštrō* "(I am) Zoroaster"; cf. also *zaraθuštrāi ... yā vā frīnāi* "for (me), Zoroaster, who devote myself to you" (Y. 49.12) and *mōi ... zaraθuštrāi* "for me... (who am) Zoroaster" (Y. 46.19), which can hardly mean "for me ... in favor of Zoroaster." The discussion culminates in *zaraθuštrāi ... ahmaibiiācā* "to Zoroaster and to us" (Y. 28.6), which, according to Kellens and Pirart (loc. cit.), would definitely exclude the prophet's authorship but which can easily mean as much as "to (me)



Zoroaster and to (all of) us.”

All transmitted dates for Zoroaster’s life are speculative, obviously ranging the prophet in a religious history of salvation. The traditional date of 300 years before Alexander’s invasion is transmitted in several variants, all of which are of the same type as Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī’s 258 years before Alexander’s invasion, which was taken by Walter B. Henning (p. 41) as a precise and reliable date but which is just derived by deducing the traditional 42 years of Zoroaster’s age at Vištāspa’s conversion from the round number of 300 years. In the view of the present author the only date of some historical plausibility is that of Xanthos the Lydian, a contemporary of Herodotus, according to whom Zoroaster lived 600 years (*lectio facilior* 6000 years) before Xerxes’s expedition against Greece (error in Humbach 1991, I, p. 26, corrected in Humbach and Ichaporia, p. 11, n.).

The sixteen songs arranged in the first four Gathas (Y. 28-51) are an obviously preconceived unified whole. Each of the concluding stanzas of the first three Gathas refers to the *frašō.kərəiti* (q.v.), the brilliant-making of the world/life (i.e., its perfection, renovation, and transfiguration), that of the fourth Gatha only (Y. 51.22) has a different subject, and its complicated structure rather recalls that of the opening stanza of the first Gatha (Y. 28.1). In this connection, it is noteworthy that the subjects of the concluding stanzas of the songs *Yasna* 30 and *Yasna* 49 are taken up again in the subsequent opening stanzas of *Yasna* 31.1 and *Yasna* 50.1, respectively. All of these sixteen songs are composed to accompany official ceremonies of worship ordered and financed by Kauui Vištāspa, the princely protector and promoter of Zoroaster, who was assisted by the members of his circle, Fərašaoštra and Dəjāmāspa Huuōguua, two noble brothers, and by Zoroaster’s clan, the Haēcaṭ.aspa Spitamas to whom Maidiiōimāṇha Spitama belonged, according to tradition a cousin of the prophet and the first person converted by him. In *Yasna* 46.12 the whole group seems to be qualified as descendants of a forefather named Tura son of Friia. His name recalls that of Tūr, the forefather of the Turanians, the opponents of the Iranians in their legendary tradition. Strangely enough, the name of the Aryans, which is well attested in the Younger Avesta, does not occur in the Gathas.

The prophet was a member of the priest class as he is called *āθrauuā . . . zaraθuštrō* in Young Avestan *Yašt* 13.94. He must even have been the descendent of a family of practising priests, which was the compulsory precondition for his becoming the heir of the religious and poetical tradition



that we can reconstruct by comparison with numerous Vedic data, but of which he is our only immediate witness. He must also have been well-trained in ritual procedures, speaking of himself as a *zaotar-* (Y. 33.6), thus using a term which scholars usually take as being synonymous with *āθrauuān-* (see [ĀSRŌN](#)) but actually meaning “officiating priest.” As seen from Young Avestan *tūm nō āθraom zaota stē* “you, O *Āθrauuān*, are to be our *Zaotar*” (*Visprad* 3.7), *zaotar-* denotes an *āθrauuān* who is entrusted with directing a given sacrificial ceremony, an unmistakable evidence of the sacrificial function of the Gathas.

When referring to the cattle-breeding herdsman (*vāstriia- fšuiiaṇt-*), Zoroaster evidently includes himself. In the Younger Avesta this expression denotes the lowest of the three social classes, but in the Gathas it does not at all qualify the prophet as being of low origin; it just shows that priests, no less than other people, could occupy themselves with cattle-breeding.

From *Yasna* 43 and *Yasna* 44, in both of which Zoroaster describes himself as meditating in front of the holy fire, elements of his legendary biography have been derived by the Middle Persian tradition, interpreting each of the two songs as reflecting one step in Zoroaster’s religious experience. The passage *spəntəm at θβā mājīhī ahurā hīiaṭ mā vohū pairī.jasaṭ mananḥa* “I realize that you are holy, O Mazdā Ahura, when one approaches me with good thought” (Y. 43.7) was erroneously translated as “I realized that you are holy, O Mazdā Ahura, when Vohu Manah (Good Thought; see [BAHMAN](#)) approached me,” developing there from the legend of Zoroaster’s meeting with Vohu Manah, who came to guide him to the first audience granted him by Ahura Mazdā which, again in the view of the tradition, is described in *taṭ θβā pərəsā* “this I ask you” (Y. 44.1). These theological speculations are untenable from the scholarly point of view, but they must be very old as they are reflected in the Mazdayasnian calendar and other Young Avestan passages in which Aša has yielded his inherited precedence to Vohu Manah, who was the first divinity considered as to have entered into contact with the prophet.

Several modern translators (e.g., Nyberg, pp. 233 ff.) take also the beginning of *Yasna* 46 as a specific autobiographical reminiscence of the prophet, interpreting it as a recount of a flight from his homestead and native place, taken by him in his early years, thus attributing to him a fate similar to that of Moḥammad. This interpretation is derived from the prophet’s complaint: *pairī mā xʰatəuš airiiamnascā dadaitī nōiṭ mā xšnāuš yā vərəzəṇā hēcā* “they keep me away from family and tribe; the community that I wish to join does not gratify me” (Y. 46.1), in which, however, the prophet does not complain about



his being expelled from his native place but about his not being admitted to the people whom he wants to convert, which is no individual experience of Zoroaster but a typical experience of a priest who sets out to disseminate new religious ideas.

Almost all scholars, not to speak of lay translators, are inclined to interpret each single Gathic phrase as representing an integral element of an underlying religious system conceived by the prophet, thus considering the Gatha as a didactic poem, a sort of religious handbook with carefully coordinated and harmonized paragraphs. Yet this opinion is contradicted by the enigmatic style of the majority of Gatha stanzas (Y. 28-51), which evidence a sacrificial mysticism and spiritual esoterism of which *Yasna* 29, the so-called “Complaint of the Cow,” is particularly characteristic. This song must have been completely unintelligible to the public and, therefore, absolutely unsuited for any didactic approaches. Mystics cannot be rationalized. It is the fifth Gatha only (Y. 53) that, though being unsystematic as well, is of a distinct didactic nature.

The overwhelming majority of stanzas of the first four Gathas is explicitly addressed to Ahura Mazdā. All the evidence indicates that Zoroaster composed this group of texts to enter in contact with him for the purpose of invoking and glorifying him, and to commune with him about both spiritual and worldly subjects, about the elimination of evil in the world and the freedom from evil in the after-world, and, furthermore, about the material problems of his own and of his adherents, particularly about providing for himself the funds required for getting people to accept his religion by increasing his reputation and public esteem.

Beings other than Ahura Mazdā are addressed only in a few passages: The addresses to the “approaching ones” found in *Yasna* 30.1 (*išəntō*) and *Yasna* 45.1 (*yaēcā... išaθā*), both of which are customarily interpreted as opening sermons for a crowd of people, are directed to Ahura Mazdā and the divine entities accompanying him rather than to humans (cf. the addresses to the entities *aša*- “truth” and *armaiti*- “right-mindedness” in Y. 28.7 etc.). They are negatively mirrored by the apotropaic scorning of the demons (*daēuuā*) in *Yasna* 32.1, 3, 5, for which, cf. the apostrophe of the noxious animals (*xrafstrā*) in *Yasna* 28.5, that of men in general in *Yasna* 30.11 (*mašiiānhō*), and that of the deceitful in *Yasna* 31.20 (*drəguuantō*).

The further addresses of humans by the prophet found in his first four Gathas



are clothed in the form of rhetorical digressions, i.e., a sort of apostrophes. After having started with the nominative, Zoroaster passes over to the vocative in the three passages in which he proclaims two or more names of his respective sponsors: *Vištāspō...Haēcaṭ.āspā... Fərašaoštrā ... Dəjāmāspā* (Y. 46.14-17), *Vištāspō ... Fərašaoštrō ... Dəjāmāspō ... Maidiiōi.manhā* (Y. 51.16-19), and *Fərašaoštrāi ... Dəjāmāspā* (Y. 49.8-9)

Of his adherents the prophet speaks in a lofty tone. They are styled *ašauuan-* (truthful) by him, he himself being the truthful one par excellence. Of the rulers and the other persons hostile to him, qualified by him as *drəguuant-* (deceitful) and summed up as *kauuis* and *karapans*, Zoroaster draws a very negative picture. In *Yasna* 49.1 he calls down divine help for immediate extermination of Bəṇḍuua, a chieftain, who hosts a deceitful teacher; in *Yasna* 51.12-14 a person called *vaēpiia-* is blamed by the prophet for not having hosted him in his home, and a hellish fate is predicted for his soul. Due to the sharp contrast the eulogy of Vištāspa's merits found in the two following paragraphs (15-16), and the promise of his paradisiacal future, is rendered even more impressive by the prophet.

In the numerous stanzas that must have been entirely unintelligible to his human audience, the prophet demonstrates the secret knowledge shared by him with Ahura Mazdā. Other stanzas, in which statements, requests, and questions are addressed by Zoroaster to Ahura Mazdā in a language which was intelligible at least partially, were meant to reach his audience indirectly. Typical of this method is the question "will I deserve that prize: ten mares with a stallion, and a camel" (Y. 44.18), which is formally addressed to Ahura Mazdā but actually to the prophet's patron. Both this passage and *Yasna* 46.19, where Zoroaster requests two cows, belong to the traditional elements of Indo-Iranian sacrificial poetry coming to light in the Gathas. Occasionally even short allusions may have been perspicuous to the audience, such as the prophet's very short reference to the legend of Yima (Y. 32.8), with which people undoubtedly were well-acquainted.

Only occasionally do the Gathas give an exact and clear picture of Zoroaster's actual teachings, but in general they reflect them in a modified and elaborated form, many times marked by complexity and ornateness of style, the prophet demonstrating his poetical skill in order to stimulate Ahura Mazdā to fulfil his requests or to answer his questions. There is, e.g., a notable disagreement between the descriptions found in *Yasna* 45.11 and *Yasna* 51.13 of the destiny of the soul (*uruuan-*) of a deceased deceitful person upon its arrival at the



account-keeper's bridge (*cinuuatō pārətu-*; see ČINWAD PUHL) and the part which is played there by his religious view (*daēnā-*; see DĒN), a disagreement which cannot be explained but by poetical license.

Poetical elaboration on the syntactical level is found in the series *x<sup>v</sup>aētū-*, *vərəzəñā-*, *airiīaman-* (family, community, tribe), which is attested in its basic form at best in *x<sup>v</sup>aētəuš ... vərəzəñaxiiācā ... airiīamnascā* (gen./abl., gen., gen./abl.; Y. 33.4), whereas its three other occurrences clearly show syntactical or/and lexical variation: *x<sup>v</sup>aētūš yāsaṭ ... vərəzəñəm maṭ airiīamnā* “the family entertreats, the community along with the tribe” (nom., nom., instr.; Y. 32.1); *x<sup>v</sup>aētū vā aṭ vā vərəzəñiiō airiīamnā vā* “by family, or being a member of the same community, or by tribe” (instr., adj., instr.; Y. 33.3); *x<sup>v</sup>aētəuš airiīamnascā ... yā vərəzəñā* “from family and tribe ... the community with which” (abl., abl., instr.; Y. 46.1); *kə airiīamā kə x<sup>v</sup>aētūš ... yə vərəzəñāi ... vaṇ<sup>v</sup>hīm dāṭ frasastīm* “which tribe, which family will it be who will give the community a good renown” (nom., nom., dat.; Y. 49.7).

As to the prophet's actual instructions, we may safely assume that he affected a cultivated but perspicuous way of speech, perhaps in the manner of the Buddha's utterances, hammering the triplet *manah-*, *vacah-*, *š'iiəoθanā-* (thought, speech, action) into the minds of his followers again and again. Yet, whereas this triplet is well attested in its basic form in the Younger Avesta, it is usually presented by the prophet in his Gathas in numerous variations and transformations of lexical and syntactic nature. The only paratactic occurrence of the series is incorporated in the tetrad or pentad *mañiiū ... x<sup>v</sup>afəñā ... manahicā vacahicā š'iiəoθanōi hī vahiiō akəmcā* “both spirits ... both dreams, both thoughts and words, both actions, the better and the evil one” (Y. 33.3). As contrasted with this, see the elaborations of the series in, e.g., *ārmətōiš uxδāiš š'iiəoθanā* “the actions (inspired) by the utterances of right-mindedness” (Y. 44.11), and in *cistī uxδāiš š'iiəoθanā* “by the action (ordered) by words (inspired) by the insight” (Y. 51.21). In these the member *manah-* is replaced by *ārmaiti-* or *cisti-* and the member *vacah-* by *uxδa-*. The syntax is most complicated in *akā manəḥhā akascā mañiiuš akā š'iiəoθanəm vacəḥhā* “with evil thought both the evil spirit and the action (inspired) by evil speech (cheated you)” (Y. 32.5), in which the triad is enlarged into a tetrad by addition of *mañiiu-* (spirit).

According to the picture drawn by Zoroaster in the Gathas, Ahura Mazdā is accompanied by a number of divine entities which are partly understood as divine or human qualities, but which can also present themselves in



personified form as divinities. In the latter case they are similar to the Aməša Spəntas (q.v.) and Yazatas of the Younger Avesta, but in the Gathas their name is Ahuras as attested in the phrase *mazdāscā ahurāṇhō* “the/you Ahuras and (Ahura) Mazdā” (Y. 30.9, 31.4). Among these Ahuras certainly are *ātr* “fire” (see [ĀDUR](#); [ĀTAŠ](#)), a manifestation of Ahura Mazdā’s fiery spirit, furthermore *θβōrəštār* “the shaper” and *gəuš tašan* “the fashioner of the cow” (q.v.), two names of one mythical person which is different from Ahura Mazdā: *tašā gəuš pərəsaṭ ašəm* “the fashioner of the cow asked the truth” (Y. 29.2), *θβā ... θβōrəštā tatašā* “the shaper has fashioned you” (Y. 29.6), but whose activity is ascribed to Ahura Mazdā himself in *yəgəm tašō* “you who fashioned the cow” (Y. 51.9).

Another group is formed by ethical principles and heavenly boons: *spənta-manīiu* “holy or prosperous spirit” (cf. *spanīiah*-, superlative *spəništa-manīiu*-, Y. 45.2, 30.5, etc.), *aša* “truth,” *vohu-manah* “good thought” (superl. *vahišta-manah*-, Y. 30.2, etc.), *ārmaiti* “right-mindedness,” *sraoša* “obedience/answer,” *aši* “reward,” *ādā* “apportionment,” *xšaθra* “power,” *hauruuatāt* “integrity,” and *amərə(ta)tāt* “immortality.” In the Gathas, which have some trait of pantheism, their number is open. In the poetic style of the Gathas they are exchangeable to a certain extent: Thus *ašahiiā gaēθā* “the herds of truth” (Y. 31.1; cf. YAv. *ašahe gaēθā*) is replaced by (*ašā*) ... *ārmatōiš gaēθā* “through truth ... the herds of right-mindedness” (Y. 46.12), just to avoid the repetition of *aša*- in one and the same stanza. In a similar way, the element *aša*-, as found in *gaēθā ašā frādəntē* “the herds are furthered through truth” (Y. 43.6) and *gaēθā ašā frādōiṭ hacəmnā* “may further the herds in agreement with truth” (Y. 44.10; cf. *ašəmcā frādaṭ.gaēθəm*, Y. 33.11), is replaced by *vohu-manah* “good thought” and *θβaxšah* “zeal” in *gaēθā vohū frādaṭ manəṇhā* “further the herds with good thought” (Y. 46.13) and in *gaēθā frādō θβaxšəṇhā* “furthering the herds with zeal” (Y. 46.12), whereby *θβaxšah*- is advanced to the rank of a divine entity.

There is also a notable relationship between *manīiu*-(spirit) and *manah* “thought,” which is seen in *manīiəuš ... spəntahiiā ... š’iiəoθanā* “actions of holy spirit” (Y. 28.1) as compared with *vanjəuš manəṇhō š’iiəoθanā* “actions of good thought” (Y. 34.10; cf. 34.14 *vanjəuš š’iiəoθanā manəṇhō*, Y. 34.10, and *vanjəuš š’iiəoθanāiš manəṇhō*, 50.9). In such cases there is no notable difference between the two. A compromise form between *spənta-manīiu* “holy spirit” and *vohu-manah* “good thought” is *vohu-manīiu* “good spirit,” coined for metrical reasons in *vanjəuš manīiəuš š’iiəoθanāiš* (Y. 45.5), *vanjəuš manīiəuš*



*š'iaoθanahiiā* (45.8), and *vañhəuš mañiiəuš š'iaoθananqm* (49.8). The attribute *vanhu-* is artistically shifted from *manah-* to *mañiiu-*, and at the same time the attribute *spənta-* is shifted from *mañiiu-* to *nar-* “man” in *aṭcā ī tōi manañhā mañiiəušcā vañhəuš vīspā spəntaxiiā'cā nərəš š'iaoθanā* “all of the good spirit is offered to you thoughtfully, as well as the actions of the holy man” (Y. 34.2). For reasons of symmetry of the attributes, *aka-* *mañiiu-* “evil spirit” (see [AKŌMAN](#)), the opposite of *vohu-* *mañiiu-*, replaces *aṅgra-* *mañiiu-* “destructive spirit” (attested in Y. 45.2; see [AHRIMAN](#)) in *akā manañhā ... akascā mañiiuś akā š'iaoθanəm vacañhā* “along with evil thought ... the evil spirit and the action (inspired) by evil word” (Y. 32.5). Yet note that neither *spənta-* *mañiiu-* can be replaced by *\*spənta-* *manah-* nor *aṅgra-* *mañiiu-* by *\*aṅgra-* *manah-*.

In the same way as *gəuš tašan-* and *θβōrəštar-*, divine entities such as *spənta-* *mañiiu-* and *aša-* can also be considered at one and the same time as qualities or abilities of Ahura Mazdā and as divine individuals who represent these qualities and abilities by being united with him in a mystical many-in-one-relationship. This complicated picture of the Gathic Ahura concept is corroborated by some traits of the Young Avestan concept of Spənta Mañiiu and the Aməša Spəntas. Ahura Mazdā is identified with Spənta/Spəništa Mañiiu in the frequent Young Avestan address *ahura mazda mañiiō spəništa dātarə gaēθanqm astuuaitinqm ašāum* “Ahura Mazdā, Mañiiu Spəništa, truthful creator of the corporeal world”; similarly his creative activity, which is described in *yaθa dāmqn daθaṭ ahurō mazdā* (Yt. 19.10), has been transferred to the whole group of the Aməša Spəntas, thus depicting them as acting on behalf of Ahura Mazdā, in *ānhqm dāmanqm yaṭ ahurahe mazdā dātarasca marəxštarasca θβarəxštarasca* “the creators, formers and shapers of the creatures of Ahura Mazdā” (Yt. 19.18). Vice versa, Ahura Mazdā is also described as taking on the shape of each of them in *kəhrpasca ... raθβaiieiti ... aməšanqm spəntanqm* (Yt. 13.81; see Humbach and Ichaporia, 1998, pp. 18-20).

In the Gathas, the ethical quality *aša-* is not only a manifestation of human piety and divine mercy, but it is also an immaterial or material aspect of the offerings made to Ahura Mazdā by the pious and the boons received by them from him in recompense. On the one hand see *yā š'iaoθanā yā vacañhā yā yasnā ašəm amərətātəmcā taibiiō dānhā ... xšaθrəmcā hauruuatātō* “the (ritual) action, the (ritual) word, (and) the worship through which you take hold of truth, immortality, and the power of integrity” (Y. 34.1) said to Ahura Mazdā, and on the other hand see *tāiš yūš š'iaoθanāiš ašəm xšmaibiiā daduii* “through those actions you will acquire truth,” where the pious are apostrophized to by



the prophet (Y. 46.15).

As a counterpole to the mystical nature of the Gathas the formal poetry plays an essential part in them. A highlight of such formal poetry is *Yasna* 47.1, where the tetrad *mañiiu-*, *manah-*, *vacah-*, and *š'iiāoθana-* “spirit, thought, word, action” is artistically intercrossed with the heptad *spənta-* *mañiiu-*, *aša-*, *vohu-* *manah-*, *ārmaiti-*, *xšaθra-*, *hauruuatāt-*, and *amərətātāt-* “holy or prosperous spirit, truth, good thought, right-mindedness, power, integrity, immortality”:

*spəntā mañiiū vahištācā manəḥhā*

“with holy spirit and best thought,”

*hacā ašāṭ š'iiāoθanācā vacəḥhācā*

“with action and word in accordance with truth,”

*ahmāi dən hauruuātā amərətātā*

“they shall offer Him integrity (= liquid offering) and immortality (solid offering),”

*mazdā xšaθrā ārmaitī ahurō.*

“The Ahura is Mazdā (= wise, remindful) through power and right-mindedness.”

Besides its highly developed poetical form which serves the purpose of pleasing Ahura Mazdā, this stanza offers an example of sacrificial mysticism that was inherited from the Indo-European period and which, therefore, is of particular interest. A careful grammatical analysis of the context of the couple *hauruuatāt-* and *amərətātāt-* in this stanza (and in Y. 33.8, 34.1, 34.11, 45.10) proves that it does not necessarily denote boons granted the pious by Ahura Mazdā (as in Y. 44.18, 45.5, 51.7); it can also refer to the liquid and solid parts of the ritual offering (*miiazda-*), a metaphorical use which is well attested in the Younger Avesta and which is based on the idea of mutuality between God and man. The couple recalls Vedic *amṛ'ta-*, the nectar conferring immortality, but it is even closer to the Greek couple *nektar* and *ambrosia*, the drink and the food of the gods.



The first period of the world was that of Yima's paradisiacal rule which was ended by the sin committed by his revolt against Ahura Mazdā, thereby opening the world to the invasion of evil accompanied by poverty, sickness, and death, and to its continuous fight against Ahura Mazdā about the surpeme rule. Zoroaster calls up the pious to make an end with these conditions, to restore the unlimited power of Ahura Mazdā by eliminating any kind of evil on the world, thus propagating the *frašō.kərāiti* in order to open the third period which at the prophet's time was expected for the near future.

The sacrificial mysticism which dominates the first four Gathas is not easily accessible to readers of our time. Most typical of this mysticism is the idea of the miraculous multiformity of Ahura Mazdā's manifestations at the sacrifice in which the principles of Zoroaster's morals are applied and realized at the highest possible level, the sacrifice being in itself a representation, at the microcosmic level, of the *frašō.kərāiti*.

The interpretation of the Gathas as didactical poetry, versified sermons or even lessons in dogmatics is justified in the case of the fifth Gatha (Y. 53) only. This song, which unfortunately is poorly transmitted, is without the complicated figures of speech which make the interpretation of the first four Gathas so difficult. Obviously being composed in connection with the marriage of Pourucistā Haēcaṭaspānā, Zoroaster's youngest daughter (Y. 53.3), it is the only song of a less sacrificial and more private nature. Apart from the bride and her father, the text mentions Kauui Vištāspa, the Zoroastrian Spitāma, a son of the prophet, and Frašaoštra (Y. 53.2), all of whom seem to serve as witnesses to the marriage. Frašaoštra's brother Jāmāspa is not mentioned. If the legendary tradition is right in considering him as the bridegroom, the song must have been recited at the bride's departure from her father's home, the bridegroom not yet being present, perhaps expecting her in his own house. A larger public is included in the following lines. Vividly and in the non-puritanic manner of an archaic unadulterated society, these describe the worldly bliss that is bestowed on the faithful couple, but they also depict the disaster and death which is to be brought upon the deceitful evil-doers who have to expect eternal damnation.

Prophecies such as the last mentioned contradict the sweet picture of the Gathas drawn by numerous authors of our time. As a matter of fact, Zoroaster presents himself in many further passages of the Gathas as a severe religious leader who does not only foretell the future of mankind and their after-life but who also propagates harsh measures against any living enemy and adversary.



In the second last line of *Yasna* 53, Zoroaster asks the rhetorical question *kū ašauuā ahurō yā īš jiiātəuš hāmiθiiāṭ vasə.itōišcā* “where is the truthful Ahura who may deprive these (deceitful) of their livelihood and liberty?” and in its last line he concludes the Gatha collection by giving the answer *taṭ mazdā tauuā xšaθrəm yā ərəzəjiiōi dāhī drigauuē vahiiō* “it is your power, O Mazdā, through which you will grant what is better to the poor person living decently.”

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